TL 2692

FRETILIN: THE RESISTANCE WAYS

From the origins to Matebian fall

When the 25th April 1974 happened in Portugal there was no organised anticolonial movement in East Timor.

"We may...declare that until the end of the fifties, East Timor national liberty mouvement had no ruling class. Only in 1970 there were conditions to create in East Timor a clandestine organisation whose reduced members, that found later the ASDT/FRETILIN, were in a regular contact with the clandestine nucleous abroab, proceed to a detailed study of geopolitical and internal realities, tried to follow closely the evolution of the national liberty fight (struggle) in the portuguese colonies in Africa and the resistance against the fascism in Portugal."

In a general way we may consider 3 main nucleous of a pro-indepandance mouvement in the beginning of the seventies:

- University students in Portugal grouped in the ~~Timorese House~~ "CASA DOS TIMORES" influenced by the radicalisation suffered by the portuguese student movement after 1969;
- Students ~~of Dilis secondary schools and young employees~~ (High-school and office workers) inspired ~~influenced~~ by the liberation movements on the portuguese colonies and by the anti-imperialist movemnt & in the region;
- A few "petit bourgeois" intelectuals, older than the students, remains of a memory of the resistance to the colonial occupation pleading for an indefinite project of cultural and political identity;

These two last groups were the essential of the ASDT, founded on the 2oth May 1974. However the programme was clearly for independance, anticolonialism and anti-imperialism, the action developed by this Association was based on a great undefined politic, which is ~~very~~ well expressed on the very name of this association, ~~always behind the short existence~~. It is only after the union with the ~~Timorese House~~ "CASA DOS TIMORES" group that we may verify a clarification and a radicalisation of the proposals and political actions.

~~In a way this alteration is very well expressed in the change of the ASDT into FRETILIN~~

In spite of the pressing of the events, the disinterestedness of the portuguese central administration in Timor's descolonisation process, the permanent threat of an indonesian military intervention hinded the development of the political differences and contradictions and their resolution.

"The C.C., formed by 52 members, was a combination of social democracy, marxism and populism standing together just because they have the same aim: the national independance." (2)

The 11th August 1975 UDT coup and the FRETILIN's answer changed completly not only the strength ratio between them but also the internal structure of the organisation.

"FRETILIN saw an enormous, premature and inevitable growth between 20th May 1974 and 7th December 1975. In less than an year the initial nucleous of those who founded FRETILIN, became the major force in the country; the 25 poorly armed men of the 15th August 1975, turned quickly into an army, even with some organisational problems, after the 20th August. On 15th August 1975, they were only a vulnerable central base in Ai-Sirimou but a month later they had a real political, military and administrative control of all the country. It's no doubt that it was a quick and premature growth but it was also necessary and inevitable. (2)"

"This victory was achieved so quickly largely as a result of the support of the timorese troops in the portuguese colonial army (...). This led to an influence of military men at all levels of the organization which in turn had a significant impact on FRETILIN's internal structure and its political and ideological emphasis (...). Three professional soldiers were co-opted into the FRETILIN central committee (...). This strengthened the more traditional or conservative elements at the expense of the radical wing influenced by the 'Casa dos Timores' Group". (3)

On the 28th November 1975, FRETILIN declares an unilateral independance and on the 7th December began the indonesian invasion.

The "promenade" imagined by the military aggressors became a slow and hard move for the conquest of positions. During the first phase of the war, FRETILIN preserved its position of superiority, as the invading forces only gained control of the major towns and main roads. FRETILIN keep up under his control "80% of the national territory and more than 90% of the population in spite of the powerful war machine of the ennemy" (2).

But this position of superiority is only apparent because the militar and potential lead stands in the hands of the indonesians.

In the beginning of 1976, and accordingly with the new conditions of struggle, the C.C. establishes the main lines of the liberty movement:

"The II FRETILIN CC Plenary Session took place in Soibada from 15th May to 2nd June 1976, This meeting establishes the three main lines of the Maubere's Revolution: popular war, long-term war and the principle of self-reliance" (2).

These new orientations brougth deep changes in the political, military and organisational affairs. But "however FRETILIN adopted formally a long-term people's war strategy, they really never implemented it" (4).

On the militaty front, the FALINTIL was reshaped into a regular army. Small unities called shock brigades were set-up to launch quick raids on the rear enemy forces. This new structure has implicit a militar conception of a "positional warfare". (...)

~~"Besides some of the FRETILIN militar commanders, trained by the portuguese, still thinking on war in a classic way, as a position's war. In fact, so many civilians in the liberated areas, push FALINTIL forces to group their positions in a border protecting line. The siege on the defense of the liberated areas, until the end of 1977 prevented the diversification of the guerrilla war as well as reduced the capacity of resistence to the siege and destruction campaigns" KAX.~~

"Bringing this militarist war conception the FALINTIL gave a primordial importance to a positional warfare over a guerilla movement more and more relegated to a secondary and complementary plan. (...) Besides this fact is linked with

FALINTIL origins which kept a long time actions and conceptions herited from the colonial army" (2).

The preponderance of the "military line" over the "political line" goes with a changing on the conception of the political struggle control -"the proclamation of the FRETILIN CC as the vanguard of Maubere People in the present phase - replacing FRETILIN itself, as it was before" (5).

On 11th September 1977, Nicolau Lobato, declares on Radio Maubere: "it is necessary to reenforce our unity - People/FALINTIL/leaders - and together we must reenforce our unity around our vanguard - the heroic, correct, wise and intrepid FRETILIN CC. Let's reenforce our unity around FRETILIN CC" (5).

The meeting of the Supreme Council of Struggle (FRETILIN) and the Political Committee, in Lalimé from 8th March to 20th May 1977, ratifies the three main principles of the Maubere Revolution and aproved "the document from the FRETILIN's CC Department of Political and Ideological Orientation, untitled "The National Liberation Movements, the Imperialism strategy and the Puppet Parties" (2).

The document is an attempt to give an answer to internal divergences on the question of the negociations with the indonesian invador, defended by Xavier do Amaral, FRETILIN's former President. There, even with a certain triomphalistic tonic, it is requested to settle the position of the organisation in this subject.

"If for the truly nacionalist forces victory is sure to happen, for the imperialists the defeat's terror , mainly in the military field, makes him blush for very shame.(...) Talk with the enemy means a great error that may bring to our people disastrous and irrecoverable consequences. Nevertheless, it doesn't means that after an inconditional withdrawal, negociations aren't necessary to discuss the question of the indemnity for war damages caused to our mother-land. (...) Negociate never, but immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of the javanese from RDTL". (5)

Xavier do Amaral, even then politicaly isolated at the time -"in mid-1976, at the time of the Soibada Conference, he had been criticized for his feudalistic attitudes and insistence upon a comfortable life-style" (3) - would say later, when interviewed in 1983 for the Far Eastern Economic Review, that since 1975 he defended the creation of a committee to contact the indonesians. This argument, that he argued in 1977, was based in the terrible price in human lives it would be necessary to pay if the negociations were not accepted.

Xavier do Amaral and his supporters were dismissed of their functions and

arrested on the 13th September 1977. Nicolau Lobato, FRETILIN's Vice-President and RDTL prime minister became President.

But the divergences were'nt resolved and others will resume later the same question, with more dramatic consequences.

On September 1977 Indonesia changes the strategy and launch the first of a ~~series~~ encirclement and annihilation ~~siege and destroying~~ campaings, first considered with a certain optimism by the leaders.

"In about 6 months, the enemy has been launching the real first and big encirclement and annihilation campaign. However, even with such an impressive warlike pomp, they can not pass through our boarder lines" (5).

On 4th March 1978, Radio Maubere resumes the indonesian military strategy: "In this precise moment, the enemy strategy consists on encirclement and annihilation campaigns in order to conquer sector by sector. In the mean time, in others sectors of the country the enemy is launching quick attacks just as a manoeuvre" (2). ~~That is, the enemy was using the tactics foreseen by the shock brigades~~

The first great indonesian offensive (September 1977/February 1978) destroy all the boarder area; on May/June 1978 is all the central area that is destroyed and, finaly, on September 1978/March 1979 the Ponta Leste.

"Initially, they retreated with the population, but as the situation deteriorated, the FRETILIN leadership had to take the difficult decision of telling the people to surrender to the Indonesians. They were forced to explain that they could no longer continue the old strategy of establishing frontlines and waging semi-positional warfare." (3)

The destructive indonesian wave, combined with the increasing human and logistic difficulties brings up the leaders' crisis.

"At the end of 1978 the Political Direction of National Resistence passed through s deep crisis because it was necessarily reduced to the intransigents, those with a hight level of political conscience".

"(...) it was time to conclude that triumphalism, foolish optimism doesn't stand for nothing but the subestimating of the enemy and the surestimating of our own forces. The blustering and revolutionary slogans mechanical repeating succeed despair and capitulation. Thus it appears Alarico Fernandes betrayal ~~treason~~ at the end of 1978" (2).

Alarico Jorge Fernandes had been FRETILIN's delegation leader in Baucau and later ~~responsible~~ secretary for the Internal Administration and Security Department of the CC. With the unilateral and formal independence proclamation he is appointed

as Minister of Information and (Internal) Security, having on its hands the Radio Maubere Broadcasting.

At the end of 1978, Alarico Fernandes leads the Skylight Operation whose purpose aimed at the close openning negociations with Indonesia and a cease firing agreement, aiming "to fight against the so-called communist current in the CC (...) now that an East Timor non-communist independent State would be acceptable to Indonesia and the other countries of the region" (2)

His surrendar comes in the 3rd December and it is followed, among others, by the CC members João Bosco Soares and Sebastião Montalvão and the Central North sector commander Amadeu Araújo Santos, all of them "disappeared", except Alarico Fernandes, to whom the indonesians shot his wife and daughter in his presence (who later) were raped by indonesians soldiers before, exiled him in the island of Sumba.

As a result of this surrender the (Fretilin's communication) radio contact with the outside world was severed.

In the last months of 1978 defense is concentrated in Matebian Mount Region, in the eastern area of the territory, the last support resistence base. In October, the siege is closed. In November, 22nd the base falls into enemy's hands. Persecution to those who succeed in escaping continue up to March 1979. During this persecution dies in action Nicolau Lobato (3).

THE Reorganization

The following months are not only of isolation with the outside world but also between the several resistence groups themselves, the most important of them remaining in Ponta Leste with the three last FRETILIN CC original members still active in the country.

It's this group who takes the initiative to re-establish contact with the surviving FRETILIN groups in the central and border areas. The first attempts are, however, useless. The missions sent are or captured by the indonesians or come back without finding anyone.

"... there is suddenly the assault to Dili, more precisely to Becora shot-locker, to the Maribia Broadcasting ant to Faturraba and Dare military quarters at the dawn of 11th June 1980. The enemy trembles. Where are these forces coming from? - they asked" (9). The attack is a complete surprise to the generals in Djakarta who thought that resistence was destroyed and also to the Ponta Leste combatants and an incentive to go on searching for a meeting.

In October of the same year are finaly made the first connections between the isolated guerilla units and at the end of the year the connections between the surviving groups are enought to the achievement of a national conference.

In the Conference (1st to 8th March 1981) the Fretilin leadership gave an accountencirclement of and annihilation campaigns and analized the weaknesses revealed between 1977 and 1978.

The losses were crippling:

"
- 79% of the of the Supreme Command had been Killed members and only three CC FRETILIN members had survived;
- 80% of FALINTIL had been lost and more than 90% of its weapons;
- all the support bases had been destroyed and the indonesian troops now had the population under their control;
- all lines of communications between the remaining resistance fighters had been severed;
- communications with the outside world was cut off making it extremely difficult to information channels to supporters abroad" (3)

The analysis then made shows that FALINTIL didn't know how to take advantage to the specific war conditions and their advantages on the field:

"- Many FALINTIL commanders entered the force after having been sergeants in the portuguese colonial army. These origins made it difficult for them to understand and implement the people's war strategy.
- There was a lack of co-ordination and participation between commands in the various regions. Regionalism still played an important part in the minds of the commanders (...). FALINTIL commanders in the regions concentrated mainly on defending their own sectors with the result that they were ultimately defeated by the enemy. Exchange of experience was very limited. Thus, although the Indonesians repeated the same strategy time and again, FALINTIL forces were taken by surprise every time.
- Co-ordination and contact between the regional commands and the headquarters were ineffective. (...) As a result, there was no general or global plan and strategy, and it was not possible to mount a general counter-effensive.
- The shock brigades set-up to launch short, sharp attacks on enemy troops never really functioned in the way intended, and they became a defensive force.
- The white zones (the territory under enemy control) were totally neglected. As the Indonesian offensive progressed, more and more people came under the control of the Indonesian military, and FRETILIN lost contact with the vast majority of the population." (3)

The new direction issued from this Conference breaks politicaly and military with the preceding theory and practise. The maintenance of permanent bases is abandoned: FALINTIL unities turn into movable unities, always from one place to another. A net of clandestine organisations is created, at the back of the enemy lines, in the "strategic villages" and in the areas under occupation forces control. The conection between the mountains resistence movement and the clandestine net is made by the "peoples's resistence nucleous". From a political point of view, the control of the resistence is given over to the Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (CRRN) which includes the FRETILIN CC members, the FALINTIL unities commanders and representatives of the people living in the "strategic villages" and other areas under indonesian control.

Four political and military objectives are set up: all-out mobilization of the population; building a broad front; to dissipate the forces of the enemy; annihilation of the enemy.

The new FRETILIN's strategy is going to be developed around these objectives: 1982 is proclaimed the year of the strategic counter-offensive.

The results of this new direction soon shows its effects on the 23rd March 1983 when, for preliminary conversations, sit down at the same table Colonel Purwanto, representing the indonesian forces and Xanana Gusmão, President of the CRRN and Commander-in-Chief of FALINTIL.

Though this achievement cannot be disconnected with the struggle into the indonesian ruling classes which is also a consequence of the war in East Timor, the political and military resurgence of the liberation movement, it is the decisive factor for its events.

On accepting to sit down at the same table and talk with the enemy - in liberated areas and under the flag of FRETILIN and RDTL - on accepting a cease-fire agreement, on showing a Peace Plan where minimum conditions for a negociated conflict resolution were given in detail, the struggle leadership gave proof of the ripness that had arrived in the analysis of the strength ratio and that it was able to answer and face the enemy.

When it is clear that indonesian administration not only does not accomplished the agreement but also tries to show to the world a false image of the events, showing the cease-fire as a surrender, the FRETILIN's answer is to show to General Benny Moerdani that had delivered "the dagger's helve to his own enemy, staying on taking hold of the blade". (6)

On the 8th August 1983 "the struggle command orders the native revolt, armed by the occupant (...) Reorganized the country, in 1981, one of the clandestine resistence tasks was the military training of surrended guerilla to answer later to a new situation" (6).

The armed uprising takes the Djakarta generals unawares. Their answer has the usual brutality: massacre of the village population were this uprisings took place, with evidence to Kraras where 18 indonesians troops, including a captain, had been killed.

In spite of the conversations failure, the liberation movement had defined the new feature of the conflict resolution.

"FRETILIN doesn't reject, on the contrary, advocates the negociated conflict solution (...). FRETILIN is prepared for a long war for how many years Djakarta wants, FRETILIN is also conscious that the war extension means inevitably more suffering to Maubere people and ever its extermination. That's because of this that FRETILIN openned perspectives for a political solution (...). And the basis of FRETILIN's proposals is in the dialogue between Indonesia, Portugal and the East Timor representatives, under United Nations controle in order to discuss the problems of East Timor connected with its geopolitical inserting. Only a political solution which ends the war will lead the sides to bi or multilateral agreements which saveguard not only the area interests but also the superior interests of East Timor peolple" (8).

Still in 1982 the liberation movement, through its clandestine network is able to retake the information channels with the outside world.

Culminating this pacient work, on 6th January, the radio connections are fixed, showing that in spite of all its military and economic power, of all supports it has from the World Bank to the IGGI (Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia) of the active or passive complicity of Eastern or Western powers, Indonesia is not able to silence an isolated people in half an island. Because this people has known to preserve alive the flame of a deep nationalism and the lucidity to choose the weapon that better served him.

NOTAS

(1) A. Araújo, "Timor-Leste, os Loricos Voltaram a Cantar", 1977
(2) FRETILIN, "Relatório da Delegação do CC da FRETILIN em Missão de Serviço no Exterior do País", 1982
(3) C. Budiardjo e L. Liong, "The War Against East-Timor", 1984
(4) D. Freney, "FRETILIN: Death and Resurrection", 1984
(5) N. Lobato, "FRETILIN é a Liberdade do Povo em Marcha", 1979
(6) X, "Carta do Interior", 1984
~~(7) FRETILIN, "Statement by the FRETILIN Delegation to the Fourth Committee During Discussions on the Question of East Timor", 1984~~
(8) FRETILIN, "Questões para a Compreensão da Unidade Nacional", 1984
~~(9) X, "Relatório", 1984~~
(9) X, "Relatório", 1984